

A LANDMARK OF ARCHITECTURAL DISTINCTION

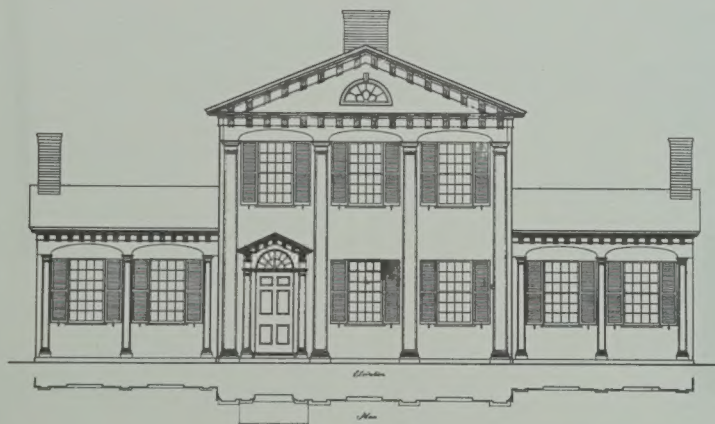
A MONUMENT TO THE PRESERVATION MOVEMENT

Built about 1819 for Eliakim Barnum, the Barnum House has long been recognized as one of Ontario's finer examples of neo-classic architecture. Admired for its carefully detailed and well-preserved facade, the house illustrates the influence American architecture exercised on the design of buildings erected in Upper Canada. The formal arrangement of a central temple front with flanking wings, the articulation of the facade with pilasters linked by elliptical arches, and the extensive use of delicately scaled details derived from the classical orders are features taken verbatim from houses built in the New England states c. 1800. These American houses in turn had been inspired by British examples, especially the work of architects Robert and James Adam, leading proponents of the neo-classic style in Great Britain.

The Barnum House was among a select number of houses included in the first published account of early Ontario buildings, prepared in 1926 by Eric Arthur,

Professor of Architecture at the University of Toronto. Growing interest in Ontario's early buildings led to the formation in 1933 of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, a private organization dedicated to the preservation of the province's architectural heritage. Seven years later, the Conservancy purchased the Barnum House and opened it to the public as the province's first period house museum.

The Second World War forced the closing of the Barnum House as a museum. In 1958, the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario presented the house to the Township of Haldimand, under whose auspices it has since operated as a local museum. This was also the year in which the significance of the Barnum House was officially recognized with a provincial historic plaque. In 1984 Parks Canada dedicated a similar plaque designating the Barnum House as a building of national importance.



THE BARNUM HOUSE
GRAFTON, ONTARIO.

Measured drawing of the Barnum House published in 1926.

ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO



THE ONTARIO HERITAGE FOUNDATION

The Ontario Heritage Foundation is an agency of the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, dedicated to promoting a wider appreciation of Ontario's rich and unique heritage, and to stimulating greater public participation in the preservation of the province's historical, archaeological, architectural, cultural and natural resources.

Through its Trust program, the Foundation acquires and maintains, on behalf of the people of Ontario, real, cultural and natural properties of provincial significance. These properties comprise historic buildings (such as the Barnum House), natural areas, artifacts and works of art, most acquired by gift or bequest from public-spirited donors.

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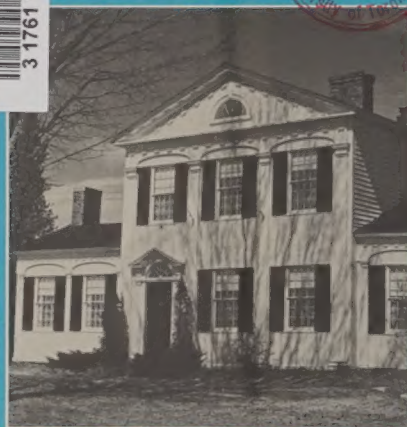
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THE BARNUM HOUSE

GRAFTON, ONTARIO



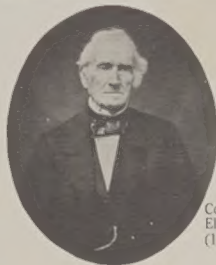
"It would be a mistake to claim that Ontario houses were better than, or as good as, the best Colonial architecture of the United States. We have not as fine staircases or as fine cornices... but there is no house of similar size and material in the United States that is the superior of the Barnum house at Grafton."

Eric Arthur
The Early Buildings of Ontario

The Ontario Heritage Foundation
John White, Chairman

The Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture
Susan Fish, Minister

Cover photo courtesy of Hugh Robertson/Panby Associates



Colonel
Eliakim Barnum
(1783-1877).

THE BARNUM FAMILY

Eliakim Barnum (1783-1877) immigrated to Haldimand Township from the United States about 1807. A young man in his early twenties, he prospered rapidly in a township which had been settled during the preceding two decades by other American immigrants, often referred to as late-loyalists.

Initially, Barnum operated a tavern and a small distillery. He purchased the lot on which the Barnum House stands in 1812-14, and by 1820 had accumulated over 900 acres of adjoining farmland. Although he was now fully engaged in developing his agricultural holdings, Barnum's entrepreneurial spirit sought new outlets.

About 1830 he erected a grist mill a half mile south of his house and operated a milling business into the early 1840's.

Eliakim Barnum married Hannah Ewing during the War of 1812. Together they raised a family of two sons and two daughters: Smith, James, Sarah and Harriet. Barnum joined in establishing the first school in the township in 1820 and acted as a local Justice of the Peace. A loyal Tory, he helped found St. George's Anglican Church in Grafton. An active member of the militia, Barnum eventually became Lt. Colonel of the Third Northumberland Battalion.

Smith Barnum, Eliakim Barnum's eldest son, received part of his father's land holdings during the 1840's. He built a brick house for his family, and soon became a prosperous farmer in his own right. In 1849 he was made first Warden of the United Counties of Northumberland and Durham.

Eliakim Barnum's younger son, James, married Edith Lyon about 1853. He remained on the family homestead, inheriting the property on his father's death in 1877. James Barnum was responsible for dismantling both the grist mill and the large barn which stood across the road from the house, an indication of the family's diminishing reliance on agricultural pursuits. Following James Barnum's death in 1907, the house remained in the Barnum family for another ten years, at which time it was sold to Mr. Harry Prentice.



Black transfer plate in the Durham pattern recovered from OHF archaeological excavations conducted at the Barnum House.

The Barnum House as it appeared about 1925.



For several weeks during the summer of 1984 the east wing was suspended on a steel frame while the delicate task of building a new foundation was completed through OHF assistance from the Ontario Government's Board of Industrial Leadership & Development (BILD).

THE RESTORATION OF BARNUM HOUSE

In 1940, the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario acquired the Barnum House from the Prentice family and undertook to refurbish it in the style of the early 1800's. The prevailing fashion for returning an historic house to its earliest appearance meant that alterations made by the Barnum family during the course of the nineteenth century were viewed as unimportant and contrary to the spirit of the proposed restoration. This approach resulted, for example, in the demolition of the partitions added (c. 1840) to divide the ballroom into two bedrooms. However, because of limited funds, the work carried out by the Conservancy created a selective and incomplete restoration, even by the standards of the time. The original ballroom mantelpiece, discovered in a nearby farmhouse, was returned to its former location, but its missing fireplace was not similarly restored.

In the years following 1940, the Barnum House suffered a fire which destroyed the rear wing and severely damaged the kitchen and its adjoining store room and pantry. Serious structural problems also became apparent in the foundations of the flanking wings. In order to ensure its preservation to a standard of care demanded by a building of such quality, ownership of the Barnum

House was transferred from the Township of Haldimand to the Ontario Heritage Foundation in 1982.

The Ontario Heritage Foundation initiated a comprehensive programme of architectural, historical and archaeological research. It was discovered that with the exception of the main facade and the front hall, alterations and removals had substantially modified the house as originally built. As a result, it represents no consistent historical period but forms a complex architectural composite containing original material from c. 1819, alterations dating from c. 1840, restoration work carried out in 1940 and repairs made following the fire in 1954.

Neither documentary nor physical evidence exists to reconstruct accurately most of the lost portions of the Barnum House. Significantly, however, the house's heritage value is derived not solely from the surviving early architectural fabric, but from the later alterations as well, especially the restoration work undertaken in 1940.

The Ontario Heritage Foundation has directed its preservation efforts to date to those areas which required immediate attention: the rebuilding of the foundation beneath the east wing and the re-attachment of large scale areas of loose plaster in the ballroom. As the on-going process of preservation continues, all aspects of the house's architectural evolution are to be respected, permitting the development of a museum of restoration which recognizes the importance of the house both as architecture and as a turning point in the history of the restoration movement.



Pine mantelpiece from the east wing as it appeared before restoration.